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PHIDIAS AND HIS WORKS

I.

(Translated for THE CRAYON from "The Tonso," by Adolf Stahr.)

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"Lächelnd steigt der holde Frühling nieder,
Doch er fadet seine Brüder nie
In Ilioss' heiligem Thale wieder,—
Ewig deckt die bange Wüste sie!"

HÖLDRLIN.

SCARCELY any vestige remains of the works of the greatest artist that the world has ever seen. Still less do we know about his life. A miserable biographical scrap, or a mutilated fragmentary notice of his works—this is all that has come down to us of a man of transcendent genius, of whom even the ancients said, "Let no one attempt to excel him!" Not even a portrait of him has been vouchsafed to us, and in vain is our longing to behold the features of the man whose genius produced the statue of Jupiter at Olympia, and of Pallas Athena, for the acropolis of Athens. How gladly would we dispense with some of our modern museums of Art if, in exchange for them, we could only secure a portrait of Phidias and of Praxitiles, of Zeuxis and of Apelles! Is it by some strange fatality that the immortal sculptor is doomed to share the fate of his great fellow-artists, of none of whom a likeness has come down to us? Or was it perchance that these artists, while perpetuating by the magic touch of their chisel or their pencil the memory of the great sages and poets, generals and kings, orators and statesmen of antiquity, felt so secure of having achieved immortality by these performances as to disdain leaving us any portrait, or other mark of their existence but that of their works? Yet the ancients were generally much given to resort to statues and portraits for the preservation of the form of the body, and the expression of the countenance. They loved, above all, to perpetuate in this manner the memory of their friends and heroes. Nay, there were even poets, authors, and orators, who caused these statues to be cast in bronze or cut in marble during their lifetime; how is it then that not a single portrait of the artists themselves has come down to us, and how is it, that in not one of the ancient writers do we find even mention made of the existence of such portraits? This is one of the many puzzling questions in connection with antiquity about which we are in utter darkness.

We are not much better informed in regard to the circumstances of the life of Phidias. Nothing very definitive can be said about the day of his birth or of his death. It does not seem that he derived a knowledge of his Art from his father, Charmides, and Phidias, therefore, cannot be said to have immediately descended from an artistic stock, although there were artistic tendencies and aspira-

tions in his family, in which respect there existed evidently a relationship between the ancient Dædalos of Athens. The genius of Phidias was remarkably precocious. While still more of a boy than a youth he left his first instructor, Hegias, of Athens, to enter the studio of Ageladas, of Argos, the most eminent sculptor of that day. At the time of the battle of Marathon he seems to have been in his twenty-fifth year or thereabout, and at that early period of his life his genius had already attracted considerable attention. Thus, when the victors of Marathon felt impelled, from a sense of religious duty, to devote the tenth part of their spoils to a monument in honor of the goddess of Athens, in grateful commemoration of a happy deliverance from the odious Persian yoke, Phidias was singled out among all the artists of the Hellenic capital to execute it, and upon him devolved the task of producing that colossal bronze statue of Pallas Athena, which, with its shield and helmet, from its lofty position upon the top of the Acropolis, could be seen from a great distance out at sea, saluting approaching sailors, for hundreds of years as a national landmark.

The life of Phidias extends over the period which elapsed between the outbreak of the hostilities with Persia and that of the great civil war which is known in history under the name of the Peloponnesian war. This was the period between 490 and 431 B.C., and although this covered only about fifty to sixty years, it seems of perennial importance, considering that it was the time when the genius of man flourished to an extent, as unparalleled in times past, as it stands unrivalled to the present day. The successful termination of the Persian war inaugurated a new era of Grecian freedom, and vouchsafed to the land a plethora of wealth. The three celebrated victories at Marathon, Salamis, and Platæa, so justly commemorated by Grecian poets, scholars, and orators, stamped their powerful seals upon the national and political character of the whole land; they became to all future generations the guardian angels of occidental civilization, which they saved from the destructive hands of the oriental barbarians, who threatened to pour their savage legions upon the beautiful shores of Hellas. With great force is this noble truth expressed by Plutarch, who remarks that these victories over the Persians became to Grecian liberty so many towers of strength, which gave to it a solid foundation, and helped to disseminate the germs of freedom all over the world. By the genius of three men, of Themistocles, Aristides, and Cimon, Athens became in less than fifty years the most powerful state of Greece. Pericles made it the "Hellas in Hellas;" Greece was merged in Athens. The little state, with its stony soil, hardly equal in extent to one of our smallest German kingdoms, with a population not exceeding twenty thou-

sand Grecian citizens in full possession of the franchise, was yet the ruler over the coast from Eubœa to the Thracian Bosphorus. Samos, the powerful Samos, the most dangerous rival of the naval power of Athens, which was called into life by Cimon's statesmanship; Samos obeyed during forty years the mandates of Athens, twice doomed to prostrate its proud head before the superior genius of its little sister state. Thus we find this Attic population blending with the elasticity, brightness, and inventive genius, which they had in common with their cousins, the Ionians of Asia Minor, a remarkable power of endurance, an amazing practical skill, and a heroic spirit, which seemed prepared for all emergencies. Hence their aptitude to avail themselves with cunning, zeal, and tact, of circumstances and events, so as to make them all subservient to their interest, thus gaining a power and a supremacy, such as no single city in Hellas ever before possessed.

After the destruction of the Persians, Athens rose, like a phoenix from its ashes, more brilliant and beautiful than before. A long triple wall was thrown up to connect the city with the port of the Piræus; the fortifications of the citadel were strengthened; the naval force was steadily increased, and Athens became secure against attacks from abroad. The rich spoils taken from the Persians, the national exchequer which was removed to Athens, the productiveness of the mines, and the flourishing condition of commerce, all contributed not only towards supporting the Athenians, but to yield a large surplus balance, which enabled them to gratify their taste for the Beautiful. At the same time a genuine spirit of republicanism pervaded the whole structure of society, arousing enterprise, and kindling the fires of patriotic enthusiasm, and while in the present day prosperity is a watchword for despicable selfishness, vulgar ostentation, and mean, self-aggrandizement, it was in those noble days of glorious Athens a harbinger of noble aspiration, a talisman of high-souled endeavors, a lever of generous, magnanimous, unselfish, heroic performances. Every one strove to benefit the common weal. Hence we hear nothing of gorgeous palaces or princely chateaux, nothing of luxurious villas, or of fashionable mansions, we hear of nothing which savored exclusively of individual ostentation and selfishness, but only of grand enterprises in the shape of public edifices, of temples, theatres, odeums, basilicas, and pillared halls. Architects, sculptors, painters, proceeded to their work with the gratifying feeling that they had not to labor for individual personality, but for objects beneficial to all classes of their fellow-men; for works which were the property of nobody, and thus belonged to everybody. The spirit of rivalry between the wealthy and influential citizens gave another impetus to the Fine Arts, for there was an inspiring ambition to spend money upon works which were conducive to the good and the happiness of all citizens without exception, works constituting the glory of the city, and, at the same time, that of the donor. What a depth of baseness of thought is displayed by those modern

writers, who, like Böttiger, attribute all those majestic institutions to a desire of "pandering to the prejudices of the mob." Cimon and Pericles were no vulgar demagogues, no Roman tyrants, and are as little open to such degrading imputations as the citizens of Athens themselves, whose foremost champions and leaders they were in the forum and on the battle-field. They were men whose ample souls were capable of lofty aspirations, and who were inspired by the noble ambition of beautifying the city of which they were the most eminent representatives. Thus they loved to clothe Athens with perennial glory by calling upon the artist to deck the city with imperishable monuments. It was a most pardonable pride which animated Pericles when he used the masts and the remains of the conquered and annihilated Persian fleet as building materials for the structure of his Odeum; when he represented the plan of the building to be an imitation of the famous golden gala tent of Xerxes, which the Persian monarch took on board of a Sidonian vessel, and in which he dwelt while, with feelings of exultation, his "eyes wandered over the countless vessels of his invincible armada."

How wonderful that period of the highest culture of Greece, which had been matured by five hundred years of preparation! The glorious advent of liberty was hailed with universal delight. Loud and joyous were the shouts of triumph of the people, and vehement the mingled sensations of pride and exhilaration which swayed their hearts. All over Greece, and especially in Athens, municipal liberty was vouchsafed to the full citizen in addition to national freedom. The citizen there rose to a sense of his dignity, and of his individuality, and he naturally felt himself the peer of all the princes and autocrats of the world. Out of this freedom, which opened a new era for the rights and the dignity of humanity, arose the freedom of Art and the freedom of philosophy. The magic touch of liberty broke the galling chain of the artist's slavery. Art, which for ages past had been ignominiously doomed to be the servant of religious superstition, now threw off this galling yoke, and breathed free again. In philosophy Anaxagoras appeared "like a sober man among drunkards" (to use the metaphor of Aristotle), and opposed to the foolish lucubrations of besotted priests, the noble laws which resulted from human thought and human experience. The spell of religious stupidity and absurdity was broken; brighter days dawned for poor humanity. The faculty of reason asserted its powers, and the laws of the universe were henceforth to be considered the developing agents of man's mind. In poetry we find Homer as the all-omnipotent representative and inspirer of Grecian thought and Grecian Art; Pindar brings lyrical poetry to perfection; Æschylus and Sophocles elevated the drama to the highest point of excellence, kindling by their productions the artists' enthusiasm, and reflecting at the same time in their plays, the inspiring influence which the artist's genius had wrought upon their own minds. In the

Fine Arts the mind was prepared by the exertions and labors of previous schools and masters, and above all by those of the Æginetans, to enter upon a new and a glorious era of development. In politics, we find men like Miltiades, Aristides, Themistocles, and Cimon at the helm of state—men who lifted little Athens into world-wide importance, and whose names spread a fragrance and lustre over all future generations. Yet, however great their glory, one man was destined to eclipse them all: this man was the tutelary genius of Hellas; he was the Phidias of politics. From his atelier came the mighty political structure of Athens; he was among his fellow-men what Zeus was among his fellow-divinities; he was called the Olympian by his contemporaries. He towered above all the towering grandees of Greece—this man was Pericles. We must direct our attention to the study of his life before we can venture to form an opinion of Phidias, and of the Augustan era of Grecian Art.

PROPORTION cannot be carefully treated with the square and compass—it is one of the spiritual perceptions of the artist-architect, and wholly beyond the grasp of the merely material-constructor. The dimensions of a window, a door, or a tower, either of which have once been erected, may be put upon paper in the shape of a diagram, and a builder may fancy he can produce a counterpart of either singly, or in combination, with little trouble; he may suppose that if a plan is wanted for a given purpose in which modifications of size, etc., are important, he can trust to a carpenter's scale that will not deceive, and reduce another person's design to the compass of his own conceit. But the scale does deceive, and beauty is not prostituted without showing signs of its defilement. Because a fine structure can be analyzed into parts, and proportions and harmonious arrangement can be measured in feet and inches, the yard-stick and a critic do not, as symbol or legislator, constitute reliable authority. What is required to produce original or transferred beauty in architecture, is a person capable of feeling and appreciating the harmony of proportion; one who can recognize the connection of one part with another; one who can, in a measure, see the relation of an atom to the universe. Proportion may, perhaps, be too subtle an element of architecture to be generally recognized, but "Effect" is not so much so. There is great beauty in effect,—that is, play of light and dark. Effect is equally dependent for its most beautiful aspects upon the feeling of the artist, but a bare recognition of the principle will oftentimes enable a bungler to accomplish wonders. Most of our houses are uninteresting for lack of effect; their walls resemble thin veneering, as they really are—honest counterfeits in spite of intention, appearing more like stone card-boxes glazed with flakes of mica, than as substantial walls, with appropriate apertures. Effect is a demonstration of utility; if a house is made up of walls and windows, we insist upon knowing what strength there is to counterbalance weakness as we walk by its side; if there is a hole left in material erected to support something, let us have, to indicate it, the dark alongside of the light which Nature orders. The upright lines of dark are as necessary to maintain the intellect strong in the faith of a substantial building at a distance, as the light upon it is to reveal the object to our senses.

THE IDEA OF A PICTURE.

CONSIDERING the idea of a picture not so much in the light by which a painter sets before himself an attempt to elevate Nature to an unattainable perfection, or an "ideality," as it is called;—but, rather as a point of view, in which the observer of a work of Art should place his mind, so to speak, when he has to decide upon the merits of a work before him, and from thence judge for himself:—under this supposition we shall proceed to illustrate certain things, which, it seems to us, ought always to be looked for in an artist's work, not only in its execution or choice of subject, but also in the motive which led to the latter, the point to which such decision should tend, and how it may be possible to make all things represented illustrations of the motive.

It seems better in addressing a reader whose study has not been in Art alone, that this should be done rather by illustration and example than by recondite and technical arguments,—as, speaking with reverence, we seldom find a judicious preacher arguing of the nature of the Trinity from the pulpit, but rather directing the attention of his audience to the working out of the law and the gospel in a practical manner, and to its value as a guide in life, and to the future.

Taking a picture as a lesson or attempt at teaching, by a vehicle which addresses some intelligences fitted to receive it,—a view which ennobs the art to the highest range of human works:—it will be then, we say, proper to consider; firstly, the value of the subject chosen; secondly, the propriety of the means taken to work that out; and, thirdly, if the painter, in using the means he has decided upon, has shown that he himself is so penetrated with the importance of his choice as to regard it in the light of a duty it behoves him to fulfill.

Of the first;—The value of the subject chosen must necessarily prove itself by being one that illustrates something which is interesting to man in its relation to human nature. We shall separate these into four classes, viz., firstly, either as inculcating the performance of duty directly; or, secondly, by being the representation of a lovely thing (a thing beautiful in itself and pure, which may, when contemplated, raise the observer's mind to a higher level), or else, thirdly, when exhibiting the performance of a noble action, by which means inculcating similar performance. These are the obvious and positive means by which a subject may prove its value:—the fourth class is the reverse of this, being allowable occasionally when we take feelings of antagonism and abhorrence to produce the same effect, as in pictures whose subjects are of a painful nature, as of horrible sights and cruel deeds.

Examples of the first class are common and obvious enough; as in all allegories, which are but abstract representations of feelings and principles, not of facts. These matters have been long ago worn out, for all will agree that a very rapid idea of charity is raised in the mind on